the body (and blood) of our lord jesus

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the body (and blood) of our lord jesus

by i_hate_you_i_dont_care

Summary

Will Graham is a priest struggling with his faith. After he literally runs into Hannibal on the street, he finds something else to worship.

Notes

I am writing this for a creative writing class and decided to post it on here as well.

I hope you enjoy!

in the beginning

In Kensington, a small borough in West London, there lived an even smaller church. It was not lacking religious beauty, however. The windows were constructed of stained glass in a multitude of colors so that when the sun hits them directly, it casts rainbow streams of light into the church. The floor was carpeted, and muffled sound slightly as you walked down the aisle to a pew. The pews are wooden and old; they creak dangerously when any weight is put on them, but the patrons have the utmost faith they will hold. There are candles in gold candelabras that litter any flat surface. The stage, about a step up from the rest of the floor, holds a marble altar adorned with a rich purple cloth. Will feels a sense of home there, a feeling he never had when growing up. Now, though, when he walked through the ornate double doors leading to the church, he wavered.

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It was the late summer when they met Father Graham— who desperately preferred to be called Will— and Hannibal. Will had been leaving his parish after an upsetting meeting with the bishop right after Saturday evening mass. He was sprinting down the cobbled streets, not paying any mind to the other passersby; his dark hair was flailing in the slight breeze as he tripped over a particularly raised stone right into Hannibal.

"Oh my god, I am so sorry," Will heaved.

"How blasphemous," the stranger smiled, not bothered by the intrusion.

Will laughed as he righted himself, looking down to dust the dirt off his black pants, "Ironic, isn't it? When was the last time you heard a priest take the Lord's name in vain."

Looking up at the man before him properly, his smile slipped off of his face. The man was handsome. He was roughly half a head taller than Will and wore a devilish smile that suited his face quite well. The man's eyes were dark hazel, starkly contrasting to Will's light blue. After a beat of awkward silence, the man extended his hand to Will,

"Hannibal Lecter."

William Graham," Will said and shook the man's— Hannibal's— hand.

"Don't you mean Father William Graham," Hannibal smirked.

Will's face grimaced, and he rolled his eyes, "God, no."

"Oh? And why is that?"

"I'm not sure it fits anymore."

His answer brought a look of pleasure to Hannibal's face, and Will was in awe of how correct his teeth looked in his face like they had been hand sculpted by the hands of God.

"Would you like to come to a dinner party I'm hosting tonight? It'll be more fun dusting candelabras."

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Will nervously walked up the steps to the giant castle that Hannibal called home, a fact which he had failed to tell him. He raised his fist to knock on the door when he noticed a gold ornate knocker. Rolling his eyes and whispering, 'Oh Jesus,' Will picked it up and let it fall. The sound was louder than he thought it would be, pounding its way into his skull, doing the opposite of what he needed for his nerves. Hannibal opened the door, smiling in the same devilish demeanor when Will ran into him. He wore an expensive black suit with a no-doubt silk tie, and Will glanced down at his plain trousers and dress shirt, feeling even more self-conscious.

"Father! Glad you could make it," Hannibal winked at him, "Come in."

"I think I'm already regretting not staying and dusting candelabras," Will said dryly, making Hannibal chuckle.

Will stepped into the house, and his gaze was met with about twenty, clearly wealthy, men and women.

"Everyone, this is William Graham, head priest at St. Augustine church."

"Hello," Will sputtered weakly, taken aback that Hannibal knew where he preached.

"I have my ways," Hannibal whispered from behind him, answering his unspoken question.

The rest of the night went along as well as it could have. Hannibal's other dinner guests seemed simultaneously disturbed and intrigued by his presence. They ate food that was more expensive than the wine St. Augustine used at Mass, and they drank pungent brandy (save for the Father, of course). After several hours and several drinks, everyone except for Will and Hannibal had said their goodbyes. They lounged together in the lavish living room. Will was sprawled out on a wonderfully comfortable couch, and Hannibal sat across from him in an armchair sipping brandy. Silence surrounded them, but it wasn't the uncomfortable, overbearing kind Will was used to.

"Do priests not drink?" Hannibal questioned; the alcohol had softened his voice.

"Most do. I do, just not around strangers."

"What about now?"

Will took a second before answering, "Are we still strangers?"

Hannibal smiled slightly, arose from his chair, and poured a hefty amount of brandy into a glass before handing it to Will. He gulped down half of the drink in one go, earning a look of surprise from Hannibal.

"So," Hannibal started, "now that we are alone, are you going to tell me the real reason you don't like being called 'Father'?"

"I told you the real reason."

Hannibal pursed his lips, "Okay… Are you going to tell me the reason behind the reason you don't like being called 'Father'?"

"Are you going to tell me why you are acting like we are on the playground and you are trying to get me to tell you my crush?"

When the only reply Will received was an amused smile, he added, "I don't know you well enough."

"Yet you accepted the drink."

It was Will's turn to smile as he drank the remaining half of his brandy and stood from the couch.

"It was lovely meeting you, Hannibal."

Will extended his hand to Hannibal; their hands lingered for a moment, neither one wanting to pull away like a strange game of wills, eyes silently daring the other to break the bond.

"It was lovely meeting you, William," Hannibal said, barely above a whisper.

Will smiled, Hannibal smiled back, released Will's hand, and walked down the foyer and out into the night. As he walked back to the church, he couldn't shake the feeling that the last time Hannibal had smiled, his teeth had looked *sharper.*

Chapter 2

The following weekend, Will was preparing for Sunday morning Mass. He stacked on the layers of his vestment deep emerald green on top of pure white. Will looked at himself in the small mirror on the wall in his chambers. He looked horrible. His hair was styled perfectly, and his robes were neatly draping his body, but there was a tiredness in his eyes Will didn't think he could pass as early morning fog. He could hear the chattering of the congregation through the thin walls and tried to rearrange his face to one of subtle pleasantness. There wasn't much improvement. He began to try again, but the loud harmony of church bells sounded over his head. It was 8:00. At the last chime of the bell, he stepped out of the room, and Mass began.
Will was about three-quarters of the way through the service and was placidly handing out Communion, not paying attention to the people lined up before him. The line was dwindling, and he looked down to pick up one of the last few pieces of sacramental bread before flicking his eyes back up to meet the dark hazel ones before them.
Will stood there stunned momentarily before remembering that he was standing before the entire parish, staring at Hannibal.

"The body of Christ," Will whispered as he handed the wafer to the man before him.

"Amen."

Will watched him as he mimicked the sign of the cross and walked agonizingly slowly back to his pew. The rest of Mass went along without another hitch. Almost everyone had left, and Will had finally been able to excuse himself from talking to the old ladies who treated him like their son. He was about to change when his eyes reached the tall man leaning against the wall opposite his changing room.

"Are you even Catholic?" Will said as he strolled up to Hannibal.

"My family was Lutheran."

"How blasphemous," Will felt a small smile creep up as he recalled their first meeting; in his mind, Will knew he should have been more upset at the sin committed, but he couldn't force himself to care.

"I came to invite you to dinner."

"Another dinner party so soon; why, Mr. Lecter, I'm beginning to think you are some kind of bureaucrat."

"And what if I am, Father Graham?" Hannibal smirked.

"Then I would have to wonder why you would want to have me again; I don't think your dinner guests were very impressed," As Will said it, the smile on Hannibal's face faltered.

“Well, it’s a good thing they aren’t coming,” Hannibal supplied; at Will’s look of confusion, he added, “I was thinking just the two of us could go to L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon.”

“I’ve never heard of that restaurant before. Where in London is it?”

“France.”

***

Will sat in the train carriage opposite Hannibal. They were three hours into the four-hour train ride to France. Will was lounging across several seats, reading the newspaper that the steward had brought him. He wasn’t reading it, though; he was trying to come up with a realistic reason as to why Hannibal was lugging him halfway across the continent for dinner. Will had asked, of course, but all he got in response was a small devilish smile and a train ticket being placed in his right hand. He shouldn't have gone with Hannibal. He barely knew the man, but Will had never felt so comfortable around another person before, and who was he to deny himself a trip to France?

“Have you read a word of that paper?” Hannibal asked.

“Yes,” Will responded.

Hannibal reached across and snatched the paper from his fingertips, “What was the headline on the front page?”

“I want to say something about orphans?” Will replied, the end of his sentence quirking up in a question sense.

“Not even close. ‘Believe in Vampires: Stories From Londoners Who Are Sure They Exist’”

“Vampires? Really?” Will scoffed in disbelief.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I believe we have a skeptic in our midst,” Hannibal said, amused.

“My god! I believe we do!” Will responded, filling his voice with mock carnival excitement.

Hannibal laughed before sobering slightly, “What do you believe in then?”

“Evil.”

“You think they are human then?”

“I think cannibalism is a much more plausible answer than vampires.”

“So you think cannibalism is evil?” Hannibal smirked, on the precipice of a connection Will was sure he would roll his eyes at.

“Of course.”

“That is ironic, isn't it? Coming from a Catholic priest.” Hannibal teased Will. He had yet to put two and two together, and he knew it.

“I fail to see the point you are making.”

“The Eucharist? Sacramental bread? Holy Communion? The Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus? Are any of those ringing any bells.”

“You cannot seriously compare the two; they are completely different.” Will

“How?”

“The body and blood is a religious sacrament. Killing and eating a regular person is not,” Will countered.

“How do you know they are not eating the flesh of another as a form of worship?”

“I don’t, but I am not willing enough to compare my religion to the ‘vampiric’ killings of my fellow citizens.”

“Very well, Father Graham,” Hannibal’s voice was harsher than Will was used to, but there was an amused twinkle in his eye.

They rode in comfortable silence the rest of the way before getting off the train and walking to L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon. They walked side by side idly, chatting about how this week's sermon went and gossiping about Hannibal’s wealthy friends. Will was stunned to silence as they walked up to the restaurant doors. The little cafe was tucked away in a corner; small lights hung from a string over the beautiful patio. The pair walked in and were immediately met with a waiter showing them their table. They sat in the far corner of the restaurant, away from other people. The table was covered in a white cloth that felt incredibly soft against Will’s fingers. There were several sets of silverware that Will was sure he would not use, and fine china plates were sitting in front of him.

“I would like to ask once more before we start dinner: why did you bring me here,” Will questioned.

“I find you more interesting than any of my bureaucratic friends.”

“Is that all?” Will questioned.

He couldn’t remember a time when someone found him genuinely interesting.

“Do I need another reason?” Hannibal smiled.

“No, I suppose not.”

“Good,” Hannibal thought momentarily before losing a battle of wills against himself, “Do you find me interesting?”

Will made direct eye contact with Hannibal, smiled coyly, and said, “No.”

Hannibal smiled, and his dark eyes danced with amusement, “You will.”

The waiter brought by a glass of wine Will presumed he ordered when he made the reservation and poured them each a glass. Will watched as Hannibal took the glass by the stem, swirled it, and took a small sip before gesturing for the waiter to leave the bottle on the table. Will resisted the urge to roll his eyes at the snobbish display, but instead, he found a small smile had crept to his face.
The waiter came shortly, taking their dinner orders. Will ordered the blackened cod, and Hannibal ordered the steak. Rare. Will took a strange notice of how specific he was. They continued their polite dinner conversation, keeping it at a level just above small talk. The two were mostly done with their meal. There had been a lull in the conversation for a few minutes, and Will decided to break the silence.

“My brother died.”

“What?” Hannibal questioned, obviously stunned by the sudden outburst.

“That is why I don’t like being called Father,” Will said.

Hannibal stayed silent, prompting Will to continue the story.

“When I was twenty, my younger brother fell ill. My father was deeply religious, and went to church nearly every day to pray for him. He pushed me towards the church, and for a while, I felt truly comforted by it. So, I did what any young man does when they feel a strong connection to the church. I became a priest. And my brother miraculously got better. So, I thought I was doing the right thing in God’s eyes. I thought… I thought this was my ‘calling,’” Will began to trail off.

“What changed?” Hannibal prompted.

“He died. Two weeks ago, he had a sudden heart attack and died. I spiraled. I am spiraling. I didn’t understand what I did wrong; nothing had changed, and yet he died. I distanced myself from the church while still trying to act like nothing was wrong. One of the bishops noticed, though. That’s why I was running out of the church.”

“Right into me,” Hannibal smiled.

“Right into you,” Will smiled back.

He sat back in his chair, sobering, “Hannibal, I don’t think I can go back and preach what the church wants anymore. I mean, how can an omnipotent and ‘merciful’ god allow for so much hatred and destruction?”

“Maybe it’s time to find a new calling. A new god; one is just in his rulings,” Hannibal reached out to lay a comforting hand on his arm.

“I have not found one yet,” Will sighed wearily.

“Let’s find one together then,” Hannibal supplied, taking a long drink of the blood-red wine in his glass.

Chapter 3

Will and Hannibal retired to a nearby hotel Hannibal had booked, and they each settled into their rooms for the night. The rooms were next to each other and connected by a door in the hallway leading into the room. Will was feeling better than he had in months. He felt the pressure on his chest had dissipated, and he was quite ready for a restful night in an expensive hotel. He kicked off his shoes, lifted off his shirt, and snuggled under the silky blankets.

Will stood at the altar in St. Augustine's Catholic Church, vestment draped over his shoulder, his arms lifted. He was in the middle of blessing the body and blood. There were no communion wafers in front of him nor a chalice of wine. He looked past the bright lights of the stage and saw that the pews were empty. Who was he performing for?
He felt a presence come up behind him. And a familiar voice whispered in his ear, "Keep going, Father."
Hannibal's voice was so close to his ear, his body touching his flowing robes.

Will lifted his hands, empty of sacramental bread, and spoke, "Take this all of you and eat it. This is my body, which will be given up to you."

As the words left his mouth, he felt Hannibal shift forward and bite harshly into his exposed neck. He let out a gasp of pain, but he didn't stop. Raising his hands again, cupped around an imaginary chalice, and he continued with the next line of the prayer, "Take this, all of you, and drink from it. This is the cup of My Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me."

He felt Hannibal's teeth in his neck morph and sharpen. Will dropped his hands to stabilize himself on the altar, feeling Hannibal start to suck. He felt himself getting lightheaded from blood loss, he lost his balance, and as he fell to the ground, he heard a chorus of 'Amens.'

***

Will awoke in the plushy hotel bed, drenched in sweat. At first, he assumed he had a nightmare; his heart was rushing, and he was panting like a dog. But, his chest was absent of a fearful ache. He woke up from his dream full of something else: want. He was full of a needy desire to devour the body and blood of someone other than his Lord. He got out of bed quickly and raced toward the adjoining door, throwing it open and stepping into Hannibal's room. Will hadn't stopped to think of the time; it must have been the middle of the night, but he didn't care. Will shook Hannibal awake, the former confused and irked by the late intrusion.

"You're a vampire," Will all but screamed at him, "Or a cannibal. I haven't had time to flesh out my theory fully."

"Why are you so sweaty?" was the only response he got.

“I was dreaming and- you know what, it’s not pertinent. You’re a vampire,” Will said more insistently this time.

Hannibal gaped at him before he sat up, rubbed his face, and laughed louder than Will expected, “How the hell did you do that?”

“I’m right, aren’t I?”

“I mean, I have known you for a week, and you figured it out before the friends I’ve had for years.”

“You did say I was interesting.” Will shrugged, unsure what to do now that a monumental truth had been unveiled.

“That I did, Father, that I did.”

“Hannibal.”

“Will.”

“I want to do it,” Will said.

“Now?”

“Now.”

“Very well.”

***

Will stood on the steps of the beautiful cathedral, inches away from the door handle. He took a deep breath, in and out, and flung it open. The sight in the church was nothing like Will had ever seen; all the candles were lit, giving the room an eerie glow. He focused on the altar before him, walking up the aisle, his hand brushing against the pews. Hannibal stood behind the altar, his dark figure looming over a third body. It was strapped to the bare marble pedestal, clearly incapacitated.

Will stepped up to the stage, bowing before joining Hannibal behind the altar. He looked at the person lying bare and open on the table. Will could tell he was middle-aged, the hair by his temple already greying.

“Who is he?” Will questioned, his voice level.

“Someone bad.”

“Hannibal,” Will insisted.

Hannibal paused momentarily, “A tax collector.”

Will rolled his eyes, “Let me guess, is his name Zacchaeus?”

“How did you know?” Hannibal smiled at him.

Hannibal picked up the ornate knife that Will failed to notice sitting on the altar, “Are you sure you want to do this, Will?”

“I’m sure, Hannibal.”

The pair locked eyes as Hannibal plunged the knife into the man’s heart, carving into his flesh. There was a sickening squelch and then a crack as the knife met bone. The acrid, metallic scent of blood hit Will, and he saw Hannibal’s eyes dilate with hunger.

Will stood watching and, under his breath, whispered, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger; whoever believes in me shall not thirst.”

***

The police officers barged through the door of St. Dymphna, pistols held high, pointed at the altar. The candles were barely burning now, casting stark long shadows across the room. Officers rushed down the aisle, muffled bounding steps echoed in the great hall. St. Dymphna’s Catholic Church was empty, save for a body laid on the altar, carved and eaten. Its ribs and back were cut and splayed beneath it, a grotesque mockery of angel wings.

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